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HOW TO OBTAIN, KEEP, AND PROPERLY INSTRUCT THE NURSE *

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THE trained nurse has rounded out an even half century; she is now one of the most useful members of society; her sphere of usefulness is constantly increasing; the demands laid upon her are heavier than they were last year and she must grow to meet them.

How best to promote that growth is the purpose of our meeting here and we hope the nurse instructors, the superintendents of schools for nurses, and others interested may get an inspiration from the fellowship of the meetings and from the discussions that shall eventually make for progress in the work and send it far forward.

It is hard to understand how the sick can forget the esteem due the faithful nurse who has followed him down to the brink of the grave and gently, carefully and quietly led him back to his family and his place in life.

That she is forgotten, or remembered with dread, is true; that the world has been slow to grant her a place in the professions is true; that she is censured and criticised is also true; that she is human and worthy of criticism as are all other men and women is true; that she is acquainted with society in its weakest and most pathetic and evil places is true; that she for the most part meets her share of responsibility in adjusting the wrongs of society is true; that she has given to it her strength and thought in her youth and maturer womanhood is true; that she must be better prepared to meet the new and additional requirements is evidently true; that, according to all precedents, the initial move for her better preparation develops upon this body of women is true beyond a doubt. Individually and collectively we must make it, if made it is.

Never in all the history of the race was she more necessary than to-day, never was her work more complicated and far-reaching and never since the days of the very beginning of her work has the demand so

* President's address at the opening meeting of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools, Park Street Church, Boston, Mass., May 29, 1911.

far exceeded the supply of nurses; never was there such a dearth of women of character and refinement willing to undertake even its apprenticeship. These are some of the problems confronting the directors and teachers of nurses in this present "Year of our Lord."

On the one hand there seems little inducement (as the world recognizes inducement), little of fame or position to offer; on the other hand there is the great demand—the great need. Apparently one condition augments the other.

How shall they be met? Which shall receive our first attention and what shall be our first move?

If we consider them in their natural sequence, we must first get the young women desirable for nurses and keep them until they are prepared to take their places in the world, as the future teachers and leaders of the profession as well as props for the mentally, morally, and physically deficient.

No doubt our committee upon "How to Approach Women's Colleges" will have some recommendation for procedure; possibly they will tell us how the educated young woman may be interested in this work of ours which is paradoxical in offering so much and so little—so much of opportunity for usefulness, and so little in worldly advancement. Having heard their instructions we shall do well to follow them and try to interest the college graduate in our work. It might be well for you to appoint a number of superintendents (or better still ask them to volunteer) to really act upon the recommendations, prove their usefulness and report back to this body next year; thus should we prove our practicability and show the world as well as the young superintendent searching for methods that we are not merely sayers but doers also.

We now and then hear of some school that advertises in the secular press for probationers and we are a little shocked—but why? Other institutions of learning do it, each setting forth its own peculiar advantages—why may not we? To the minds of many the disgrace is not in the mere act of advertising but in the fact that the peculiar advantages do not exist.

Having secured our pupils, how shall we keep them and prepare them for that which they have undertaken, and the first answer is by keeping our agreement with them.

There is a pretty general feeling that the schools do not all live up to their curricula—do not give all they promise. It would appear that this fact is in a measure responsible for the complained-of dearth of young women. Let it not be attributed to the mismanagement of the superintendent, but to existing conditions and prevailing sentiment.

The majority of training-school directors have not yet learned what is due the pupil nurse or her value. Doubtless the superintendent can do much by now and then pointing out the danger in failure to keep agreements. Most business men, at least, feel very keenly the knowledge that they have failed to keep an agreement or broken a contract, whether it be with a nurse or with one of their own business associates.

In the early history of this society a movement was made toward plans for obtaining knowledge of such nurses as attempted to gain admission to one school after having withdrawn from another, it being considered an offence against their high calling. There was no doubt good obtained for the schools in this way years ago, but to-day we have applications from many who have resigned from other schools and who come to us with the statement that it is not what they thought it would be, not what was promised, and my plea now is against the old custom of a wholesale ostracising of those who resign from one school and try to enter another. Let them be at least heard.

We believe on the whole that shorter hours should be encouraged in all our schools. A ten- or twelve-hour day of such strenuous occupation and close attention to detail can but vitiate the nurse's force and this must react unfavorably upon the patient.

Various arguments have been advanced against shorter hours, but the only one requiring our attention is that which contends that unless nurses are pretty constantly at work they lose sight of the importance of their tasks, and incline to the belief that any time will do. But will not the additional time thus given for study and reflection added to the better material we might thus induce to work with us, overcome that danger? It would seem to be worth the trial.

More exactness in granting the time off duty would help immensely. The exigencies of the hospital should not interfere too often. The hospitals and schools, too, are being helped considerably, though they little realize it, by the growing demand of patients for more constant attention from the *unworn, untired* nurse.

Better instruction for the pupil other than that given by the overburdened superintendent of nurses would also aid greatly. This is due the pupil by reason of the price she pays when she gives three years from the best of her life. The special training-school committee of the American Hospital Association with courage struck the root of this matter when it made the recommendation that training schools ought not to be maintained, even in small hospitals, without at least two paid resident instructors being provided for the teaching of nurses. This number should be considered the absolute minimum, irrespective of the size of the school. To quote: The Committee further recommends

“that paid medical instruction should be employed by all hospitals that can afford to employ them; that a few hundred dollars per year will furnish competent paid instructors for the work. Where paid instructors cannot be maintained, arrangements should be made to have lectures and strictly medical teaching of the school presented by two or three medical men, rather than by a larger number of physicians.”

It is to be hoped that many superintendents of the smaller isolated schools took advantage of these recommendations and aroused their courage to make the demand. But we fear they did not, for we hear of schools not far remote from where we are assembled that have had no class instruction during the past year. Is there any wonder that a dearth of competent young women exists in those localities?

Happy that school and happy those nurses that have given them means for general culture as well as good systematic training school instruction. That there are such schools is attested by the fact that we know where nurses are taught how to wisely employ their patients, and how to amuse them, where they are given lessons in singing for their own culture, and so on.

Better housing and better food play an important part in the successful development of the schools. Surely our nurses need it by reason of their arduous tasks; surely they have earned it by the same reason. It has recently been said that no one has contributed more to the public weal than the nurse in training in our public hospitals. The soldier in the field, who does his work amidst the excitement of battle, is no more a hero than the nurse who maintains her post at the bedside in the silent watches of the night. And if the most competent mathematician were to compute the respective values and averages we believe we might hear the result as said of the faithful nurse—“She is not the least of these.”

Boards of trustees and training school committees appreciate this in many instances, for we see better and better equipment for these purposes. Comfortable nurses' homes are almost the rule, and the food in all our hospitals receives no less attention than does our aseptic surgery.

When it is known that all these conditions are met, there will be little difficulty in obtaining and keeping students—the fame of the institutions will do the rest; and by way of digression let me say that herein we see why the moderately-sized school may possibly come to the fore—it is because greater attention can be given individual pupils.

This brings us to the part this society should take in obtaining, keeping, and properly instructing the future nurse.

We believe we shall devise some way of being of actual use. We

believe it should be a moral support as well as a real, visible, practical help that we offer.

Possibly it could be done through a committee—a "Committee on Work." It might be a great help to the young or the overburdened or inexperienced member to know there is some one to whom she can apply for guidance. We know those who are too busy to even frame a curriculum. This committee could gather information as to material for such a curriculum as that particular school needs and advise regarding it. Possibly it is courage or encouragement the member needs—then let that be given. Above all things, let the committee itself be not too wise for the ordinary every-day worker to approach comfortably. Let the committee forget its hospital airs and remember it is not starting the young probationer who must be kept in line, and at the foot of the line too, but let it invite confidences and distribute assistance.

Countless ways of help might be mentioned, but suffice it to say that, doubtless, opportunities at present unheard and unthought of would arise.

Let us not separate without some action being taken toward these ends. Let it be no longer said of us as in the past that we *talk* but we seldom *do*. If it is right and expedient for us to approach women's colleges, let us approach. If it is right that the newer younger superintendent of the smaller or the larger school should add to or take from her curriculum and seeks our help, let us unite our intelligence with hers and help her solve her problem.

If trustees or boards of managers need prodding or, to put it more mildly, if they need to be allured, why do we not aid in it? Perhaps our services are not required, but we believe they are. Let us at least ascertain.

The meetings are open to you—they are yours. Bring up your questions. Do not think to convince by your silence that you have none. Every superintendent of a school for nurses has them. The more in earnest and the more active she is, the more problems she has.

As we deliberate may we be guided by the spirit of conservatism that has characterized the makers of law or custom in the "Old Bay State." Conservatism that makes for equal rights without regard to class or condition. Conservatism that even at the risk of being labelled unprogressive, forbids training school superintendents to advertise for their schools opportunities that are not but are to be. Conservatism that in the making of law or history has known no backward steps.

May we here mingle with our conservatism some of that *fervor* for which the spot whereon I stand is noted. Conservatism and fervor—*caution* and *zeal*—would accomplish much in the best way.